AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims replaces all prior listings of claims in this application.

1. (Currently Amended) A method of distributing content to consumers, the method comprising:

allowing a consumer to join a community;

monitoring access to content by members of the community, the monitoring being performed by a grid computing platform implemented by a plurality of geographically dispersed network elements, the grid computing platform executing a grid application to control resources within a distribution network;

determining a community interest in the content in response to members of the community accessing the content; and

automatically distributing the content to the consumer over a-the distribution network in response to the community interest.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein:

the community interest is determined based on the a percentage of members in the community that have accessed the content.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 2 wherein:

the community interest is compared to a reference to initiate the automatically distributing.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein:

the automatically distributing includes storing the content on a consumer storage device associated with the consumer.

5. (Original) The method of claim 4 further comprising:

notifying the consumer that the content is available on the consumer storage device; and

billing the consumer upon the consumer accessing the content on the consumer storage device.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein:

the automatically distributing the content is dependent on a consumer preference to receive automatically distributed content.

7. (Currently Amended) A system for distributing content to consumers, the system comprising:

a network element receiving a request from a consumer to join a community;

a database coupled to the network element maintaining records of one or more communities associated with the consumer;

a consumer network in communication with the network element;

the network element monitoring access to content by members of the community;

the network element determining a community interest in the content in response to members of the community accessing the content; and

the network element automatically distributing the content to the consumer network in response to the community interest;

the network element being part of a grid computing platform implemented by a plurality of geographically dispersed network elements, the grid computing platform executing a grid application to control resources within a distribution network.

8. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 7 wherein:

the community interest is determined based on the a percentage of members in the community that have accessed the content.

9. (Original) The system of claim 8 wherein:

the community interest is compared to a reference to initiate the automatically distributing.

10. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 7 wherein:

the consumer network includes a consumer storage device; and

the network element automatically distributing the content to the consumer storage device associated with the consumer.

11. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 10 wherein:

the network element notifies the consumer that the content is available on the consumer storage device; and

the network element billing the consumer upon the consumer accessing the content on the consumer storage device.

12. (Original) The system of claim 7 wherein:

the network element automatically distributes the content in dependence on a consumer preference to receive automatically distributed content.

13. (Original) The system of claim 7 wherein:

the network element includes a plurality of network elements arranged in a grid computing network.

14. (Currently Amended) A storage medium encoded with machine-readable computer program code for distributing content to consumers, the storage medium including instructions for causing at least one network element to implement a method comprising:

allowing a consumer to join a community;

monitoring access to content by members of the community, the monitoring being performed by a grid computing platform implemented by a plurality of geographically dispersed network elements, the grid computing platform executing a grid application to control resources within a distribution network;

determining a community interest in the content in response to members of the community accessing the content; and

automatically distributing the content to the consumer over a the distribution network in response to the community interest.

15. (Currently Amended) The storage medium of claim 14 wherein:

the community interest is determined based on the a percentage of members in the community that have accessed the content.

16. (Currently Amended) The storage medium of claim 15 wherein:

the community interest is compared to a reference to initiate the automatically distributing.

17. (Original) The storage medium of claim 14 wherein:

the automatically distributing includes storing the content on a consumer storage device associated with the consumer.

18. (Original) The storage medium of claim 17 further comprising instructions for causing at least one network element to implement:

notifying the consumer that the content is available on the consumer storage device; and

billing the consumer upon the consumer accessing the content on the consumer storage device.

19. (Original) The storage medium of claim 14 wherein:

the automatically distributing the content is dependent on a consumer preference to receive automatically distributed content.

20. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein:

the content includes at least one of video, audio and consumer-generated content.

21. (Cancelled)

22. (Currently Amended) A controller for controlling distribution of content, the controller comprising:

a processor executing a grid application as part of a grid computing platform implemented by a plurality of geographically dispersed network elements, the grid computing platform executing a grid application to control resources within a distribution network, the processor executing processing including:

means for receiving input from a consumer to join a community;

means for receiving content having a community interest in the content in response to members of the community accessing the content; and

means for notifying the consumer that the content is available.

23. (New) The system of claim 7 wherein the grid computing platform includes a plurality of network elements including set-top boxes, consumer storage devices and network storage devices.

24. (New) The method of claim 1 wherein the grid computing platform determines when to store a video program in response to customer preference and customer viewing habits.

25. (New) The method of claim 24 wherein the grid computing platform determines where to store the video program across a plurality of network elements, including storing the video program on a consumer storage device.